

A FACULTY OF MUSIC PRESENTATION

CD 99-68



Thursday  
October 28, 1999  
12 p.m.  
Walter Hall • Free

## MUSIC AND POETRY



**A brief introduction to Stravinsky's *Pribaoutski* by Rimmi Skeini.**

**Igor Stravinsky**  
(1882-1971)

***Pribaoutki* (1914)**

*Kornilo*  
*Natashka*  
*Polkovnik (The Colonel)*  
*Starets i Zayats (The Old Man and the Hare)*

Cynthia Won - mezzo soprano, Petar Dundjerski - flute, Rob D'Orante - oboe and english horn,  
Matthew Antoine - bassoon, Sarah Pratt - violin, Max Mandel - viola  
Meran Currie-Roberts - cello, Laura Moore - double bass  
John Hawkins - conductor

**Igor Stravinsky**  
(1882-1971)

***Suite from the Soldier's Tale* (1918)**

*The Soldier's March*  
*Music for Scene I (Little Tunes by the Stream)*  
*Music for Scene II (Pastorale)*  
*Royal March*  
*The Little Concert*  
*Three Dances (Tango, Waltz and Ragtime)*  
*The Devil's Dance*  
*Grand Choral*  
*The Devil's Triumphal March*

Robert Woolfrey - clarinet, Matthew Antoine - bassoon, Carin Dodsley - trumpet  
Ryan Purchase - trombone, Dylan Benson - percussion, Sarah Pratt - violin, Laura Moore - double bass  
John Hawkins - conductor

**NEXT MUSIC AND POETRY EVENT:** *Voice Showcase* Tuesday, January 11, 2000

**Messiaen:** *Poèmes pour Mi*, Book I, with Measha Gosman, soprano and John Hawkins, piano.  
**Ravel:** *Trois Poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé*, with Michèle Bogdanowicz, mezzo soprano and  
a Faculty of Music ensemble directed by John Hawkins. Prof. Eric Domville will provide commentary.

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*Pribaoutki* is a set of four songs on Russian folk lyrics composed by Igor Stravinsky in 1914. The four songs for voice, accompanied by eight instruments (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, violin, viola, cello, double bass) manifest Stravinsky's increased interest in chamber music after his concentration on the composition of the ballets *Petrushka* (1910-1911), *The Rite of Spring* (1911-1913), and the opera *Rossignol* (1909-1914). Prominent at the time was also Stravinsky's fascination with Russian folklore, particularly with folk song, which led him to study Russian folk music and verses. This study, in turn, inspired Stravinsky to produce his own musical settings of Russian folk verses, among them the lyrics of *Pribaoutki*.

Stravinsky composed *Pribaoutki* from August to September 1914, shortly after the beginning of the First World War and during his stay in Salvan, Switzerland. He dedicated this set of songs to his first wife, Ekaterina Stravinsky. In July 1914 Stravinsky travelled to Ukraine to obtain collections of Russian folk songs compiled by P.V. Kireevsky, a Russian folklore scholar and the head of the Romantic Slavophile movement, and A. N. Afanasiev, a fairy-tale and myth connoisseur. Immersed in the study of the songs from these collections, Stravinsky was captivated by the Russian folk expressions and by the play of phonemes which often produce humorous effect. His choice of lyrics for *Pribaoutki*, as well as the title for the set, clearly reflects his desire to bring out the propensity of the folk texts for ambiguity and punning, witticism and comedy.

The word 'pribaoutki' is the plural of a Russian word 'pribaoutka' which can be understood as "a facetious saying, witticism set as a proverb, a short fairy-tale, fable; sometimes...a short, funny story, an anecdote; sometimes...an idle but amusing collection of words with sexual allusions," according to V. I. Dal's *Explanatory Dictionary of the Great Russian Language* (*Tolkovy slovar' zhyvogo velikorusskogo yazyka*). In his own definition of



'pribaboutki', Stravinsky, however, stresses other aspects of the term. He interprets 'pribaboutki' as "a form of Russian folk verses based on onomatopoeia, a kind of nursery rhyme" and as "a kind of comic song, in which the succession of words almost does not make any sense," as quoted by Christian Goubault in *Igor Stravinsky*. According to Stravinsky, "'pribaboutki' are always short—usually they do not exceed four lines." Stravinsky adds that in the word 'pribaboutki', "'pri-' corresponds to the Latin prefix 'pre-'; 'baout' is a derivative of the infinitive of the old Russian verb 'to speak'." The folk poems of *Pribaboutki*, as well as Stravinsky's musical settings well mirror his definition of the term.

The four Russian poems of *Pribaboutki* are very amusing. They consist of short, rhymed verses based on ambiguous expressions and phonemic play. Their meaning is not always clear. The first poem, "Kornillo", is a drinking song, in which Uncle Kornillo is encouraged to visit his friend Makary, probably at the neighboring farm, and to banish his sorrow "with a hamper of strong home-brewed beer". Many words and expressions encountered in the Russian poem are obsolete and at once convey a feeling of looseness and drunkenness to a modern listener. In the second poem, "Natashka", the narrator amorously addresses a young girl as "sweetest darling" and "sweetie pie." The poem, no doubt, contains a sexual reference, as the narrator implies that the girl is about to step into womanhood. In the second stanza, the narrator elaborates on the allusion and describes a courtship dance of cranes. The meaning of the last poem of *Pribaboutki*, "The Old Man and The Hare", likewise, seems ambiguous. The last stanza reads in English translation: "Answers the old man: When the legless can run, when the armless can reach out, and when the naked can stuff their shirts!" The poem, evidently, features a witty conclusion. The old man's orders are the consequence of the appearance in the preceding stanza of a cross-eyed hare who asks him for some stew. In other words, the old man shows his unkindness and

authority and implies that the hare can never have a share!

During his study of Russian folk music and the musical characteristics of the Russian language, Stravinsky discovered that the natural accentuation of spoken Russian is often ignored in folk music. Stravinsky applied this finding to his music. For example, in the third poem of *Pribaoutki*, "The Colonel", he reassigns the rhythmic stress from the naturally-accented syllables in Russian words to the phonetic sounds he wishes to emphasize. This technique, however, does not obscure the meaning of the words, but rather enhances their comic character. In Russian, most of the words in this poem begin with a 'pa' sound, and all words begin with 'p' consonant. Stravinsky stresses these sounds in his musical setting and emphasizes the particular sound play created by the repetition of the 'p' and 'pa' sounds—the sound play is more explicit in this poem than its meaning!

The premier performance of *Pribaoutki* took place in Paris in May 1919, in the French translation by C. F. Ramuz. The same year *Pribaoutki* was performed in Russian in the United States. As Sergei Prokofiev described in his letter of December 10, 1919 to Stravinsky, during this performance, "*Pribaoutki* was so well received that the entire set had to be performed a second time!"

Programme notes by Rimma Skeini

Stravinsky *Pribaoutki*

## I. Корнило

Нутко, дядюшка Корнило,  
Запрягай-ко ты кобылу,  
У Макарья на песку  
Приразмычь горе-тоску:  
Стоит бражка в туяску,  
Бражка пьяная пьяна,  
Весела хмельная голова!  
Бражку порняй выпивай!

## II. Наташка

Наташка, Наташка!  
Сладёнка кулажка,  
Сладка медовая,  
В печи не бывала,  
Жару не видала.

Заиграли утки в дудки,  
Жиравли поплы плясать,  
Долги ноги выставлять,  
Долги шеи протягать.

## III. Полковник

Пошёл полковник погулять,  
Поймал птичку перепёлочку;  
Птичка перепёлочка пить похотела,  
Поднялась-полетела,  
Пала-пропала,  
Под лёд попала,  
Попа поймала,  
Попа поповича,  
Петра Петровича.

## IV. Старец и заяц

Стоит град пуст,  
А во граде куст;  
В кусте сидит старец  
Да варит изварец;  
Прибежал косой заяц  
И просит изварец.

И приказал старец безногому бежать,  
А безрукому хватать,  
А голому в пазуху класть.

## I. Kornillo

Now then, Uncle Kornillo,  
Go harness the mare.  
On the beach at Makary's  
You can banish your grief and sorrow  
With a hamper of strong  
Home-brewed beer.  
It'll go straight to your head!  
Open a bottle and drink it right to the bottom!

## II. Natashka

Natashka, Natashka!  
Sweetest darling,  
Sweetie pie,  
You've never been in the oven,  
Never felt the heat.

The ducks began to play pipes,  
The cranes began to dance,  
Jumping on their long legs,  
Stretching out their long necks.

## III. The Colonel

The colonel went for a walk,  
Caught a female quail.  
The quail got thirsty,  
Up and flew away,  
Fell and vanished  
Under the ice,  
There she found a bishop—  
Bishop Popovich,  
Peter Petrovich.

## IV. The Old Man and The Hare

There is an empty city;  
A bush grows there.  
An old man sits in the bush  
And cooks a stew.  
A crossed-eyed hare appears  
And asks for some stew.

Answers the old man: When the legless can run,  
When the armless can reach out,  
And when the naked can stuff their shirts!



## THE SOLDIER'S TALE- Synopsis

On his way home (**The Soldier's March**), the soldier stops to rest by a brook. He takes out a fiddle from his pack and starts to play. (**Little Tunes by the Stream**) The devil enters, disguised as a little old man, and persuades the soldier to trade the violin for a magic book. He asks the soldier to teach him how to play the fiddle and the two go off to the devil's home. After three days, the soldier leaves and continues the journey to his home-town. But, to his dismay, he finds that nobody in the village recognizes him. In fact, nobody will even speak to him! He quickly realizes that the little old man is the devil in disguise and that he has been tricked. Not three days have passed but three years. (**Pastorale**) The devil consoles the soldier and reminds him of the magic book which tells him what the future will bring. He becomes fabulously wealthy but regrets his loss of freedom and yearns for simple pleasures. He tears up the book, renounces all worldly possessions, and sets off to earn his fortune.

Stopping at an inn, the soldier learns that the king has offered the hand of his daughter, the princess, to any man who can cure her illness. The soldier decides to try his luck. (**The Royal March**) The devil and the soldier play cards. The devil wins but becomes very drunk, enabling the soldier to retake possession of the violin. (**The Little Concert**) He plays his violin for the princess and she makes a miraculous recovery. (**Tango, Waltz and Ragtime**) The soldier and the princess fall into one another's arms while the enraged devil circles about them, desperately trying to take back the violin. (**The Devil's Dance**) Becoming more and more frantic, eventually he falls exhausted. Later, he vows revenge, warning the pair never to venture out beyond their domain. (**Grand Choral**) The soldier convinces the princess to travel with him to his former home in order to bring back his mother. However, just as they reach the frontier, the devil appears with the violin and starts to play. (**The Devil's Triumphal March**) Now completely under his spell, the soldier follows the devil without resisting.